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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

June 19, 1971

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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. HENRY A. KISSINGER
THE WHITE HOUSE

Subject: Detention American Owned Vessels
in Somalia

On June 12 three U.S. owned vessels (two tugs and a work ship), a derrick and pipe laying barge, and a cargo barge used in offshore marine construction were apprehended by Somali authorities off the Somali coast while en route from Louisiana to Bahrain. All the craft are owned by SEDCO Inc. of Dallas, Texas, and its subsidiary, the Houston Contracting Company, of Houston. The three vessels and cargo barge fly the Panamanian flag while the derrick and pipe laying barge has U.S. registry. The crew of the vessels and barges is composed of Americans, Brazilians, and Germans. Seven Americans are included in the total, five on the derrick and pipe laying barge and two on one tug.

The exact distance of the craft off the Somali coast at the time of interception has not been established but various reports which we have received from Somali authorities and from the vessels themselves indicate that it was less than 12 miles. Somalia claims a 12 mile territorial sea. According to a radio transmission from one of the barges, the craft were fired upon by a Somali aircraft and patrol boat and required to enter the port of Mogadiscio where they are now under the custody of the Somali Government. Somali port authorities claim the craft were apprehended because they were not flying flags (except possibly on the derrick and pipe laying barge) and because they failed to respond to international signals to heave to. One of the tugs is damaged and surrounded by a reef while the cargo barge has drifted onto the beach.

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Our Ambassador in Mogadiscio was not able to see a high Somali official immediately. On June 16, however, he discussed the incident with the Somali Secretary for Communications. On June 17 he reviewed the situation in detail with the Secretary for Defense. Although the Somali Secretary for Defense has said that his Government does not desire to magnify the incident, up to now there has been no positive response by the Somalis to the specific points in our representations. The Ambassador is pressing vigorously for consular access to the Americans, which has so far been denied by the Somalis, as well as an early release of the craft. The Department of State is in frequent contact with a representative of SEDCO Inc.

At our request, Somali Ambassador Addou sent a cable to President Siad when we first learned of the seizure, in which he reportedly asked that the vessels be released as quickly as possible. Assistant Secretary Newsom discussed the seriousness of the situation with Ambassador Addou on June 16, emphasizing the need for consular access and prompt resolution of the problem.

The Department of State is also seeking Panamanian support in representation of their craft of registry, which may help to expedite a solution to the problem. SEDCO Inc. has obtained the services of a local Somali shipping agent and is exploring the possibility of intervention of Lloyds of London, which insures all the craft for \$6 million. Since the craft are insured by Lloyds, the British Government has expressed its willingness to have the U.K. Ambassador in Mogadiscio support our representations to the Somali Government if we should so desire. For the time being, our Ambassador believes it advisable not to draw on the British offer.

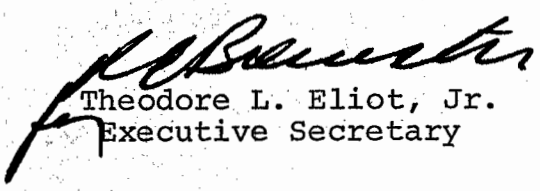
This is the fourth in a series of incidents involving American vessels since February 1970. While an incident earlier this month was settled amicably, the current difficulty has considerably more potential for harming Somali-American relations.

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The harm done to our bilateral relations as a result of the Midnight Sun incident of last summer is still fresh in the minds of all concerned. The Department of State is taking every step possible to help prevent future incidents of this nature. Warnings to appropriate organizations and headquarters concerning the difficulties encountered while plying the waters off the Somali coast have again been made. Nevertheless, as long as so many American vessels use the lanes off Somalia, and given the continuing suspicions and fears of the Somali Government, the potential exists for a future incident of this type.


Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.
Executive Secretary

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